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AUTHOR Flippo, Rona F.; And Others
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ABSTRACT

The state of Georgia not only assesses the generic teaching competencies that are necessary for all teachers seeking certification, but also administers 28 separate criterion referenced tests, each for a different content-specialty area. Among the most recent of these tests is the Reading Specialist Test, the development of which involved ascertaining the domain of knowledge required of reading specialists, analyzing their job activities, and constructing an appropriate test. A study undertaken in the fall of 1982 examined the correspondence between the content objectives of the Georgia Reading Specialist Test and the content emphasized in graduate-level reading education courses in Georgia colleges and universities. A questionnaire was sent to all faculty teaching at least one graduate level reading course with a state-approved program in reading at the master's level or higher. The 118 job-related content objectives in the six subareas of the specialist test (language development and reading readiness, reading skills, developmental reading instruction, assessment, reading disabilities, and program management) were collapsed and reduced to 56 questionnaire items. Generally the results suggested that the reading specialist candidates would do well on most of the objectives. Subarea responses looked very positive for all subareas, with the possible exception of reading skills. (HOD)

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Teacher Competency Testing and Reading Specialty Preparation in Georgia

Rona F. Flippo
Georgia Department of Education

David A. Hayes
University of Georgia

Robert L. Aaron
University of Georgia

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Running head: Teacher Competency Testing

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Teacher Competency Testing and Reading Specialty Preparation in Georgia

In an effort to control the quality of instruction offered by public schools, state departments of education across the nation are developing ways to test the competency of individuals who seek certification in their teaching specialties. This competency testing exists at various stages of development and at various levels of sophistication in many states. For example, Georgia, Oklahoma, Alabama, South Carolina, Florida, and Arizona have existing teacher competency test programs, while West Virginia, California, Maryland, Connecticut, Kentucky, New York, and Pennsylvania are in the process of developing programs or plans for programs. Georgia, Oklahoma, and Alabama have developed separate criterion-referenced tests for most of the areas in which they issue certificates. South Carolina has developed criterion-referenced tests for content areas not covered by the National Teacher Examinations (NTE) published by Educational Testing Service. South Carolina also uses the NTE area exams that correspond to the certification fields in which they certify teachers. Florida has developed one professional knowledge criterion-referenced test which all teachers in all fields must pass in order to be certified. Arizona developed one basic skills test that is required for certification in all fields. Additionally, some states require candidates to pass some component(s) of the NTE, and many other states are exploring options regarding teacher certification and competency testing (Priestley, 1982).

One state whose competency certification program has been characterized as extensive and sophisticated is Georgia (Stoltz, 1981). Georgia not only assesses the generic teaching competencies that state deems necessary for all teachers seeking certification but also administers 28 separate criterion-referenced tests, each for testing a different content/specialty area. Among the most recently developed of these tests is the Reading Specialist Test. This is a test that Georgia will require of all persons at the master's level and beyond who wish to become newly certified in reading in the State. Since Georgia has been one of the leaders in teacher competency testing and has often served as a model for other states planning such programs (e.g., Alabama, Oklahoma, South Carolina, and West Virginia), we thought it important to look carefully at the content objectives of this Georgia test and see how closely its objectives correspond with the content emphasized in graduate level reading courses in Georgia colleges and universities.

Test Development

In 1981 the Georgia Department of Education contracted with National Evaluation Systems to develop a criterion-referenced test for certification as a reading specialist. The development of the Reading Specialist Test involved three major tasks. Ascertaining the domain of knowledge required of reading specialists, analyzing their job activities, and constructing an appropriate test.

Defining the domain of knowledge required of reading specialists entailed developing a topical outline of that knowledge, elaborating that outline, and ultimately formulating 141 measurable objectives. This was accomplished by an ad hoc committee of Georgia reading professionals.

Job analysis involved the rating of all proposed objectives to determine the most critical job-related objectives. Two hundred educators certified in Georgia as reading specialists were sent surveys. These reading specialists were asked to indicate for each objective whether they had 'taught or used" the content of the objective "during this year or the past school year." For those objectives they had taught or used, they were asked to rate the amount of time spent teaching or using the objective and the extent to which they considered the objective essential to their field. Job-relatedness was treated as a two-dimensional construct consisting of "time spent" and "essentiality." One hundred and fifty-seven, or 79%, of the surveys were returned. Of those returned, 140, or 70%, were valid. (Only surveys returned by educators who were both certified and practicing were considered valid.) One hundred eighteen of the 141 proposed objectives were considered to be job-related by the reading specialists surveyed. Those 118 objectives were grouped into six subareas: (1) Language Development and Reading Readiness, (2) Reading Skills, (3) Developmental Reading Instruction, (4) Assessment, (5) Reading Disabilities, and (6) Program Management.

Test construction involved developing test items to measure each of the selected objectives. From these objectives National Evaluation Systems generated a pool of questions, and then an ad hoc committee of reading professionals approved or rewrote these test items. The items were then field tested with a sample of 23 students drawn from graduate classes in reading at colleges and universities in Georgia. A panel of Georgia reading professors and reading specialists then independently reviewed each item for content validity, determining whether the question elicited a response reflecting knowledge indicated by the corresponding objective.

This same panel also participated in standard setting by reviewing the field test data and establishing a passing score for the test. Based on the field test results and the content validation, National Evaluation Systems selected a set of items for the item pool of the Reading Specialist Test.

Rationale for Study

Throughout the development of the Georgia Reading Specialist Test great care was taken to assure that this certification test would not only reflect the content knowledge required of reading educators practicing in Georgia public schools, but conform to applicable U. S. constitutional requirements as well. The consulting firm, National Evaluation Systems, recommended the job analysis procedure used for this test in accordance with Supreme Court decisions regarding licensure tests and the job-relatedness of such tests, as cited in Rubinstein, McDonough, and Allan (1982), and the 1978 Uniform Guidelines content (EEOC, CSC, Department of Labor, & Department of Justice, 1978).

The validity and job-relatedness of the test having been established by the procedures thus described, our attention now turns to the formal training of prospective reading specialists. Does the test reflect the substance of their training? In the study reported here our attention focused specifically on the relationship between the objectives of the Reading Specialist Test and the emphasis placed on these objectives by faculty teaching graduate level reading courses in Georgia colleges and universities. Although the Georgia Reading Specialist Test was not designed to be a summative evaluation of one's college preparation, if we are to test prospective reading specialists for certification by an

instrument constructed from certain content objectives, we are obliged to determine the extent to which professors perceive those content objectives as important and the extent to which those objectives are taught in graduate reading courses. If there is a discrepancy between the content of graduate reading courses and the objectives of the job-related certification test, then adjustments may well be indicated.

Description of Study

A study was undertaken in the Fall, 1982, to examine the correspondence between the content objectives of the Georgia Reading Specialist Test and the content emphasized in graduate level reading education courses in Georgia colleges and universities. A questionnaire was sent to all faculty teaching at least one graduate level reading course in Georgia colleges and universities with a state-approved program in reading at the master's level and/or higher. The names of these faculty were gleaned from a directory of graduate faculty in reading education (Blomenberg, 1981) and by personal inquiries. In all, 55 questionnaires were sent.

The 118 job-related content objectives in the six subareas (Language Development and Reading Readiness, Reading Skills, Developmental Reading Instruction, Assessment, Reading Disabilities, Program Management) of the Georgia Reading Specialists Test were collapsed and reduced to 56 questionnaire items in an attempt to render the length of the survey manageable. Taking a Likert scale format, the questionnaire directed professors to indicate the extent to which they address each facet of instruction in their graduate reading education classes. There were four options for each set of collapsed objectives: no attention, mentioned, stressed, and major emphasis. Table 1 summarizes the responses to the questionnaire.

Results

Forty of the 55 questionnaires sent were completed and returned. This represents a 69% return. However, of the 40 questionnaires returned, only 33 were considered usable for the purposes of this study. Response to the questionnaires was assumed to be based upon teaching classes across the general areas of language development, developmental reading instruction, and diagnosis and remediation of reading problems. In order that the results not be misleading, responses were eliminated from the sample if they were based upon teaching only narrowly specialized courses. The responses summarized in Table 1 and highlighted here by subarea are based on 33 usable questionnaires, representing 60% of the total population sampled.

Language Development and Reading Readiness

In the area of language development and reading readiness, stress or major emphasis is given to most instructional areas. Respondents indicated that they teach linguistic and concept awareness and that they stress auditory, visual, and communication skills. Additionally, they indicated that importance is placed on emotional development and sociocultural and motivational factors. About half of the respondents either do not deal with specific linguistic, medical, and maturational influences on language development or, if they do, they only mention them in their teaching.

Reading Skills (of Candidates)

By far the area receiving the least emphasis in all institutions is that of developing reading specialist candidates' own reading competence. Respondents indicated that they do emphasize becoming aware of one's own

use of phonetics, and structural analysis and that they attempt to extend comprehension skills and knowledge of appropriate reference sources. However, more than half indicated that little if any attention is given to students' abilities in spelling, mechanics of writing, graphic skills, and following directions.

Developmental Reading Instruction

Of all the areas of reading specialist preparation, developmental reading instruction clearly receives the major emphasis in all institutions. Response to the survey indicates that nearly all professors emphasize the development of inferential and critical reading abilities and that nearly all attempt to demonstrate a variety of approaches to developing reading ability. It appears that in general these approaches are presented under the rubric of developing comprehension skills traditionally identified by reading teachers and publishers of reading instructional materials. These skills include identifying main ideas, recalling details, following sequence, and detecting cause-effect relations. To foster these skills, they indicate that they stress the need to accommodate variations in pupils' language background, to teach word identification skills, and to inculcate study skills. About half the respondents either do not deal with the functions of punctuation and capitalization or, if they do, they only mention them incidentally.

Assessment

In the area of assessment, reading specialist preparation appears to be strong in Georgia. Most professors indicated that they stress the characteristics and uses of different kinds of reading tests, nearly all giving special or major attention to informal reading assessment techniques.

In general, professors seem not as concerned with technicalities of formal assessment as they are with appropriate selection and interpretation of these tests.

Reading Disabilities

Responses related to teaching about reading disabilities were somewhat mixed, as would reflect the controversial nature of this area. In general, where particular orientation to dealing with reading problems was left open, response was more clearcut. Specifically, two areas strongly emphasized are identifying techniques for determining students' reading performance and identifying types and functions of materials or equipment used in remedial reading. However, where orientation to instruction takes a particular bias responses were substantially mixed. For example, matters related to either mainstreaming or clinical approaches are at best mentioned by a third of the respondents. This is not surprising given the variety of theoretical orientations which are represented in Georgia's colleges and universities. Theoretically strict orientations are less likely to give special attention to propositions considered inconsistent or unimportant. One aspect of reading specialist preparation not identified with any particular orientation was shown to receive little or no attention by over half of the respondents — teaching about purposes and procedures for communicating with related specialists regarding students in remedial reading programs.

Program Management

Response to the questionnaire indicates that Georgia colleges and universities are providing instruction in reading program management, but for the most part attention is limited to management concerns related to

classroom reading instruction. Most respondents indicated that they deal with reading program goals and objectives and identify activities and materials appropriate for developmental and remedial reading. Nearly all demonstrate readability prediction techniques. Most emphasize methods of evaluating and modifying instruction However, few respondents indicated that they give important consideration to promoting interaction among teaching, supervisory and administrative personnel. Only a handful of respondents said that they deal with Public Law 94-142, Education of the Handicapped Act.

Conclusions

It seems reasonable to expect that reading specialist candidates will be successful on test areas/objectives in which stress or major emphasis was placed in their coursework. Conversely, on areas/objectives in which faculty indicated no emphasis, or as only mentioning in their graduate courses, potential deficiencies might exist. For instance, the cumulative responses of 60% of the graduate reading faculty in Georgia indicates that about half or less than half of them put little emphasis on: specific linguistic, medical, and maturational influences on language development; the reading specialist candidates' own reading and study skills abilities; functions of punctuation and capitalization; concepts of test validity and reliability; cooperation with other professional personnel and knowledge of relevant professional affiliations/publications; and Education of the Handicapped Act (Public Law 94-142).

A common thread of weakness across the subareas was in objectives dealing with cooperation with other professionals. Additionally, there is evidence that little attention is paid to teaching reading specialists

about other professional fields which are related to reading. The Handicapped Act is only mentioned, or not mentioned at all, in graduate reading coursework.

Generally, the results suggest that the reading specialist candidates in Georgia should do well on most of the objectives of the Reading Specialist certification test. Subarea responses looked very positive for all subareas, with the possible exception of "Reading Skills." If these faculty perceptions are accurate, and if institutions have not in some way assured students' competence in the reading/study skills, statewide test results are likely to indicate weaknesses in candidates' own reading abilities and study skills.

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Table 1

Emphasis Reading Professors Place on

Areas of Preparation for Reading Specialist

Certification in Georgia[a]

Area of Preparation[b]	No Attention	Mentioned	Stressed	Major Emphasis
Language Development and Reading Readiness				
Phonology, morphology, semantics, and syntax	4	12	10	7
Psychomotor skills	4	13	15	1
Linguistic awareness	2	4	16	11
Auditory and visual discrimination/perception	1	7	13	12
Auditory and visual memory	1	6	23	3
Oral communication skills, concept awareness, and reading readiness	2	2	11	18
Sociocultural factors	1	8	18	6
Emotional development	3	8	16	6
Interest/motivation	1	2	16	14
Health and physical development	2	14	13	4
Reading Skills of Candidates				
Phonics	2	5	14	12
Structural analysis	1	6	14	12
Spelling irregularities	3	13	11	6
Synonyms, antonyms, homonyms	1	6	15	11
Word meaning using context	1	2	14	16
Word meaning using dictionary	4	13	11	5
Comprehension skills	1	2	10	20

[a] N=33

[b] Abstracted from questionnaire items and presented in abbreviated form

Area of Preparation[b]	No Attention	Mentioned	Stressed	Major Emphasis
Reading Skills of Candidates (continued)				
Punctuation/capitalization and effect on passage	2	13	16	2
Following directions	3	13	10	7
Graphic interpretation	2	14	14	3
References sources	1	10	16	6
Developmental Reading Instruction				
Variety of approaches to teaching reading	0	2	7	24
Techniques to accommodate different language patterns	3	4	19	7
Techniques for word identification	0	1	16	16
Techniques for developing vocabulary	1	10	14	8
Techniques for developing literal comprehension	1	2	10	20
Techniques for developing interpretation of punctuation/ capitalization	5	13	12	3
Techniques for developing inferential comprehension	0	2	12	19
Techniques for developing critical reading	0	2	14	17
Techniques for developing literary appreciation	1	3	17	12
Techniques for developing reading/listening skills	0	3	19	11
Assessment				
Norm-referenced and criterion-referenced uses of tests	1	6	17	9
Attitude/interest tests	1	4	16	12
Observation, cloze, and IRI	1	1	10	21
Concepts of validity and reliability	3	15	14	1
Selection of tests	2	2	17	12

Area of Preparation[b]	No Attention	Mentioned	Stressed	Major Emphasis
Reading Disabilities				
Physical, psychological, intellectual, or socio-economic factors	2	6	12	13
Demonstrate an understanding of observation or referral procedures, and uses of visual/auditory screenings	3	7	13	10
Independent, instructional, frustration, and potential levels	1	1	10	21
Selection, scheduling, and grouping remedial instruction	3	7	17	6
Motivational strategies	0	8	19	6
Integrating remedial reading within regular classroom	0	10	16	7
Monitoring/recording student progress in remedial reading	4	10	16	3
Communicating with other professionals and agencies	8	11	12	2
Remedial reading materials/ equipment	1	6	19	7
Program Management				
Remedial, developmental enrichment programs	0	4	23	6
Interaction with students, parents, classroom teachers, administrators/support staff	7	12	12	2
Goals of comprehensive reading curriculum	2	8	15	8
Evaluating reading programs	5	4	21	3
Scheduling reading program	4	13	12	4
Placement of students	3	7	19	4
Education of the Handicapped Act (Public Law 94-142)	10	15	8	0
Selection of materials	1	8	17	7
Readability level	0	6	23	4
Selection of literature	2	9	13	9
Professional organizations and publications	2	15	12	4